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ABSTRACT

The ethnic and cultural makeup of classrooms is changing rapidly, the percentage of school children of color is increasing, and the percentage of teachers of color is declining. This paper examines the challenge of preparing primarily white, middle-class teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms for all children. Teacher education programs should help teachers understand the broad concept of multicultural education, acquire basic cultural knowledge about ethnic pluralism, learn how to analyze their own and their students' ethnic attitudes and values, and develop a variety of culturally responsive methodological skills. Teacher educators can prepare culturally responsive teachers by helping them develop a clear understanding of the aims and goals of multicultural education and create a philosophical context from which to view ways in which multicultural education addresses cultural diversity. It is a commitment to basic human rights which implies that teachers in a pluralistic society have the ethical, legal, and moral responsibility to provide each child with a chance to succeed academically. Instructional strategies with sensitivities to individual and cultural differences can play a significant role in improving learning for all children. (Contains 11 references.) (LL)

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS

A Paper
Presented by

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The uniqueness of the United States as a democratic society is its cultural diversity. We celebrate that! The very nature of our common culture is "multi-cultural" encompassing peoples from many indigenous "First Americans" as well as from every European culture, plus an ever-increasing number from the rest of the world. What we do not celebrate is our difficulty, dating back to our earliest days, of agreeing on how and what to teach young citizens about their multicultural heritage and about their participation in our diverse, complex world. In this paper the authors examine how to prepare teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms for all children.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

During the last fifteen years we've seen a dramatic change in the ethnic composition of our society. Ethnic minority populations are increasing at a much faster rate than the mainstream population. The 1990 census shows that one out of four people who lives in the U.S. is a person of color, and that by the turn of the century, one out of three will be. Similarly, ethnic and cultural makeup of classrooms is changing rapidly. By the year 2020, students of color will make up nearly half (46%) of the nation's school age population. Currently in states such as California, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico the "minority" populations in the schools are quickly becoming the "majority" (NCSS, 1992).

While the percentage of schoolchildren of color is increasing, the percentage of teachers of color, which was about

12.5% in 1980 continues to decline and is expected to drop to about 5% in 2000 A.D. (NCSS, 1992). As our society is becoming more ethnically diverse, faculty and students in teacher education are becoming more homogeneous. This increasingly rich diversity of cultures coming into the public schools creates a challenge for teacher educators preparing teachers who are primarily white and middle-class. These new teachers, with limited cross-cultural experience, will be expected to help all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and values to participate in our increasingly culturally diverse society.

A RATIONALE FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Multicultural education grows out of the notion of E Pluribus Unum (out of many, one), the democratic ideology upon which our country was founded. Ethnic and cultural diversity must be viewed as a positive, integral component of our democratic ideals. Without the inclusion of all peoples within our society and the protection of their rights, we all sacrifice justice, equality, and human dignity. The survival of our democratic political system, the common culture of our society, as well as the good of all individuals within the society depend on the ability of individuals from diverse cultures to transcend their cultural borders and to engage in dialogue and action necessary for the common good (Benard, 1991). Therefore, it is both desirable and essential that schools help all children learn to function effectively in diverse ethnic and cultural settings.

Multicultural education is not only politically and morally imperative, but without it our society will continue to witness the exclusion of many of its citizens and to experience the evils that flow from racism. Children's attitudes about themselves and about people who are culturally similar or different form very early. These attitudes and beliefs are influenced by others, beginning with parents, teachers, and the media, and directly affect their interactions with, and behavior toward others. These interactions can be positive and growth enhancing, or they can result in distrust, hate, or rejection. Through multicultural education, teachers and schools can influence the formation of more positive and accepting attitudes.

Guidelines for multicultural education have been delineated by the National Council for Social Studies who suggests that if schools choose to incorporate multiculturalism into their educational programs, they must show a commitment; to recognizing and respecting ethnic and cultural diversity; to promoting societal cohesiveness based on the participation of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples; to maximizing equality of opportunity for all; and to facilitating constructive societal change that enhances human dignity and democratic ideals (NCSS, 1992). Multicultural education is much more than using multiethnic children's literature or celebrating the holidays of other cultures, or having a cultural fair at the end of the school year. Superficial responses to multiculturalism can instead create stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Multicultural education seeks to help students become aware of their individual origins and those of others in our country, to appreciate the contributions of all groups to the richness of our national culture, and to value the ethnic and cultural diversity of our pluralistic society. The school should be a place where students learn to accept themselves with all their strengths and limitations, where they learn to see others as having equal worth and dignity regardless of their differences, and where materials are free of bias and stereotyping and instead demonstrate the positive aspects of our pluralistic society. School should be a place where instructional strategies promote students' self-esteem and teach specific concepts related to the universality of all people and the positive aspects of diversity. Evaluation techniques should reflect respect for the individual with realistic expectations for each student (Tiedt and Tiedt, 1986).

MULTICULTURALISM IN TEACHER PREPARATION

Studies reveal that there has generally been more activity and progress related to multiculturalism within school district staff development than in university teacher education programs (Gay, 1986). Approaches in teacher education vary across institutions and have been described as fragmented and superficial. Often multiculturalism is encapsulated in a separate course. Sometimes it is added as a special unit within another course. When the course or unit is completed, so is multicultural-within-the-curriculum (Garcia and Pugh, 1992).

Increasingly students entering preparation programs for elementary teaching are nonminority students who have only limited knowledge of the concept of diversity. Most come from rural or suburban communities where cultural diversity has not been their experience (Garcia and Pugh, 1992). Most have a limited and often short-sighted understanding of multiculturalism, believing it to be about minorities and problems associated with these groups. Preparing teachers for multiculturalism in today's environment is becoming more challenging at the same time that it is becoming more critical for our children.

While there is great disparity as to how cultural diversity is incorporated within preparation programs, there is a growing consensus about what should be included. Experts agree these preparation programs should help teachers to understand the concept of multicultural education, to acquire some basic cultural knowledge about ethnic pluralism, to learn how to analyze their own and their students' ethnic attitudes and values, and to develop a variety of culturally responsive methodological skills (Banks and Banks, 1986).

Conceptualizing Multicultural Education

The success of multicultural education is dependent primarily on the teacher's understanding of the concept and commitment to its implementation. Therefore an essential first step in preparing teachers is to develop a clearer understanding of the aims and goals of multicultural education. As teachers

conceptualize the what, why, and how of multiculturalism, they realize the transformation that must take place. They realize it isn't a replacement or an add-on to a social studies unit. It isn't the infrequent events such as Multicultural Day or Black History Month. It implies that a wider lens be used in determining curriculum, a lens that reflects our pluralistic society. It implies that students be taught about the diverse cultures of our common heritage and how to function in a complex, diverse society. They begin to understand that much of what has been done under the label of multicultural education has been a superficial attempt to celebrate the "trappings" of another culture rather than any real understandings of the traditions and values of others (Nakagawa and Pang, 1990).

Students in the authors' practicum classes are immersed in multiculturalism as they read and discuss accounts relating the experiences of minority groups dealing with culture conflicts in the schools. They begin to question what "equal educational opportunity" really means. Their search continues as they spend much of the semester working in classrooms with diverse populations. They grow to view multicultural education as the broad, encompassing concept it is and to appreciate more clearly its aim in providing equal educational opportunity for all children.

Knowledge About Cultural Pluralism

Multicultural education involves both teaching ethnically different students and teaching about ethnic pluralism. Both require teachers to have knowledge of cultures and life experiences. Several cultural components are particularly important for teachers to know if they are to understand and be able to teach to and about other peoples. Gay (1986) suggests the study of such cultural components as ethnic value systems, socialization and communication patterns, learning styles, and interactional styles. Teachers also need to know the facts and effects of economic inequality and racism.

Life experiences are generally inadequate in providing teachers with the breadth and depth of understanding of other cultures. Preservice teachers can develop a reasonable knowledge-base with selected prerequisites in history and anthropology. In addition, students in our programs read materials authored by members of other cultural groups. Response journals and discussion groups provide opportunities for clarifying ideas and appreciating differing perspectives. While in the school practicum, students are required to develop a case study about a student at risk for academic failure. They observe, interview, collect anecdotal records, and bring their cases to a simulated staffing with peers. The process has proven very helpful in increasing their ability to view children as individuals with unique strengths and limitations.

Attitude and Value Analysis

Studies of effective schools consistently show the positive effects of high teacher expectations. When teachers believe students are capable of learning, they teach accordingly, and students respond. All students are seen as having the abilities to experience academic success. Teachers build on students' strengths and view culturally different ways of learning as resources to be used rather than as limitations.

The teacher's ability to communicate without bias or prejudice with ethnically diverse students and to convey belief in their potential is critical if all students are to have an equal chance at academic success. Not surprisingly, some students become very adept at interpreting non-verbal behaviors and can sense subtle bias and discrimination. It is essential that teachers examine and confront any stereotypical expressions or behaviors that may in some way diminish a student's self-perception (Pang, 1988).

It seems reasonable that the more one knows about other groups, the less likely one is to hold negative attitudes. Thus developing a sound knowledge-base of other cultures increases the likelihood that we accept and respect people who are unlike us culturally. It also seems reasonable that clear thinking skills that allow teachers to analyze their own and their students' attitudes and values will help reduce overgeneralizations and prejudice. We are all victims of our own misconceptions to some degree, and none of us remains untouched by the discriminatory images and behaviors we have been socialized to accept. Looking

at one's own stereotypes and expectations, distinguishing categorical thinking and stereotyping can permit us to see the limitations they place on our thought and behavior. Logical thinking and reasoning activities can be useful in helping students examine their attitudes and beliefs about others, especially others whom they know little about. Also, videotaping can provide opportunities for teachers to appraise their expressions and behaviors in order to recognize and then counteract any previously internalized messages.

Culturally Sensitive Instruction

A solid knowledge-base and sensitivity to different cultures are necessary, but not sufficient. These must by complemented by culturally sensitive curriculum and instruction. Using the best of what we know about learning theory and instructional methodology suggests that an effective program will be personally-involving, interdisciplinary, and integrated.

Active, hands-on, non-evaluative learning activities in which children feel valued and find success in their efforts are essential in a student-centered multicultural program. Students become active participants in the process if the learning evolves out the their interests and questions. Concept webs or charts are used to cluster students' thinking and background knowledge. They also serve to organize what students want to know, and later, can be used to compare what they learned. Organizers such as these get students involved and allow them to examine the accuracy of their knowledge base. Strategies that invite

students to share individual perspectives without fear of negative response or evaluation such as journal writing are effective. Similarly, researching family histories supports the students' self-esteem as they learn to value their own cultural backgrounds.

Cooperative group learning has proven to be especially effective for many cultural groups who value cooperation and interdependence (Slavin, 1979). Students learn to work toward mutual goals and to benefit from the contributions of others. Working together promotes the understanding that people are more alike than different. As the necessary skills for cooperative group learning develop over time, students come to see and hopefully, respect and appreciate the other person's point of view and also learn how to handle conflicts that arise from differences.

An effective multicultural program will be interdisciplinary and integrated. To fully understand a culture, their own or another, students must come to view it from multi-discipline perspectives. Problems such as ethnic conflict and racism are not merely political or economic. They also have social, cultural, legal and moral aspects. Cultural beliefs, traditions, and problems such as struggles for equality are often reflected in the literature, art, music and drama of a culture. Studying a culture from only one dimension limits and can misinform. Integration across the curriculum helps students make connections and get a more complete picture. For example, in social studies, approaches to multicultural learning include both an in-depth

single-group approach and a multiple perspectives approach which focuses on an event/topic from the views of all groups involved (Savage and Armstrong, 1992). Through these approaches students can appreciate how various groups interpret reality and recognize our universal characteristics and concerns. Only then can we feel we have enabled all children to function effectively in our diverse society.

All preservice teachers need opportunities to teach in culturally diverse settings while in preparation programs where they can have on-going dialogue and support of other teachers, colleagues, and supervisors. Within this context, they can find assistance in developing integrated, multicultural units and lessons, and problem-solve management conflicts they are experiencing.

CONCLUSION

Teacher educators can prepare culturally responsive teachers by helping them create a philosophical context from which to view how multicultural education addresses cultural diversity. It is a commitment to basic human rights which implies that teachers in a pluralistic society have the ethical, legal, and moral responsibility to provide each child with a chance to succeed academically. We know that all people do not learn in the same way and that equality does in fact imply interacting with people in ways that respect their uniqueness rather than their ability to conform. Instead, combining effective and varied instructional strategies with sensitivities to individual and

cultural differences can play a significant role in improving learning for all children. "Multiculturalism ultimately is a way of thinking. It's thinking about concepts from different people's vantage points...It's caring, and taking action to make our society more just and humane" (Banks, 1992, 22).

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